

Fact Finding Study on Conflict Widows

Final Report

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Acknowledgements

This report exemplifies the cumulative strength of feminist acting together to make a positive difference for the most affected population of the present conflict – the widows and their children/dependents.

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For Nagarik Aawaz*

Executive Summary

Women and children are usually the worst hit people in conflict situations, and Nepal is no exception. This fact-finding study was undertaken during the declaration of the state of emergency by the Government, after the escalation of violence owing to the Maoist insurgency in Nepal. The purpose of this study is to generate basic information. Hence, the study is exploratory and more of a fact-finding mission.

The main objectives of the study are to: (1) investigate the conditions of the widows of the victims; (2) assess economic, social, physical and psychological damage/situation that they are facing; and (3) suggest areas of support that could be provided.

In all 68 widows, 10 in Kathmandu, 20 in Surkhet and 38 in Nepalgunj, were interviewed. By categories these consisted of 32 widows of police, 12 widows of government service personnel, 10 widows of civilians, 8 widows of Maoists, 4 widows of local leaders and 2 widows of local leaders.

Findings of the Study

The average age of the widows was 30 years while the average age of the husbands that were killed was 35 years. The youngest widow was 19 years old while the oldest was 45 years old. The youngest husband to be killed was 20 years old while the oldest was 51 years old. The findings reveal that the youngest age at marriage of the widows was 9 years while the oldest age at marriage was 24 years. The youngest age at marriage of the husbands was 12 years while the oldest age at marriage was 34 years.

The average size of the family was 5.36. There were 134 school going age group children that were affected by the conflict in the 68 families. Of these 78 were female children while 56 were male children. Six female children and 4 male children of school going age were also found not attending school.

Twenty-four of the widows were illiterate while sixteen of the widows had primary education. Similarly, 6 of the widows had attained secondary education and 19 high school education while only 3 had college education.

Thirty-six widows continued living in the same residence as before but 32 widows were now living elsewhere. The place of migration was primarily to the district head quarters where they felt they could be safe and where they felt there were better opportunities of work. There were others that migrated to Kathmandu where they had relatives. For many of the widows natal families were their only sources of support.

There were in all 15 members of the families that were separate because of the death of the male member of the family. Of the members that were separated 12 were children while the rest consisted of daughter-in-law/s and grandchildren.

Most of the families of the widows were dependent on the pensions that they were receiving. Similarly, the present occupation of the families was primarily related to agricultural farming. Families dependent on income earned from wage labour followed this. Very few families were in government service and undertaking business. However, there were quite a number of families that reported no occupation.

Thirty-one widows (31) were undertaking agricultural work to sustain their families. Twenty-six widows were not working at all. There were 4 each of the widows that were earning from business and working as wage labour respectively. Likewise, widow's earning from service, selling wood and teaching respectively were one each.

Widows that were receiving financial support were 40 while 28 reported that they were not receiving any financial support. Of those widows that reported that they were receiving financial support 26 reported that they were being adequately supported while 14 reported that they were not adequately supported.

The impact of the death of the husband was felt immediately since most of the families did not have the funds to even perform the funeral rites. This was followed by children dropping out of school and decrease in access to basic needs, such as food, clothes, shelter and health care. The access to loans from relatives, friends and neighbours also was reduced since there was no guarantee that the loans

would be paid back by the widows. Among the widows that were taking loans it was found that widows that looked for opportunities to work was looked upon negatively and hence many faced problems to getting work. The widows also reported that there was lack of funds to celebrate religious festivals.

Mainly natal family, neighbours and friends supported the widows. Friends of the deceased husband and colleagues also helped the widows. It was observed that among the Brahmins and Chhetries assistance from mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law was very limited while among the occupational and ethnic groups mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law were found to be very supportive. This could be because of the rigid rites and rituals and the discrimination against daughters-in-law among the Brahmins and Chhetries while this was not the case among the occupational and ethnic groups who were found to be more lenient.

Most of the widows that were taking loans were getting them from friends, relatives and neighbours. There were some widows that had accessed loans from the Single Women Groups Organization. Source of income has affected that families' access to food as well. Not all affected families were receiving adequate food. It was reported that mostly the widows remained hungry after feeding children.

Investigation on the reasons as to why the widows were not undertaking income generating activities was because the widows lacked skills, opportunities to develop skills, market and funds. Most of the widows expressed that household chore, child-care and farm activities kept them busy with little time to undertake income-generating activities. There were widows who explained that family members prevented them from venturing outside the house to work because of insecurity and also because their mobility was closely monitored and restricted. Some of the widows were mentally disturbed and were suffering from depression that prevented them from undertaking IGAs. There were still other widows that simply lacked knowledge on IGAs and did not have the confidence to undertake any activity.

The investigation on the social conditions of the widows revealed that for 36 widows there were no changes in the attitude towards them after the death of their husbands from the community, while 32 widows stated that there were negative changes in the attitudes of the community towards them. Similarly, 33 widows reported no change in attitude towards them from the other members of the family while 35 experienced negative attitudes within the family.

All of the widows reported that they had not received any support from organizations to deal with social problems.

All of the widows reported that they had aged before time. They had reduced weight and were anemic. Gastric problem was reported which they blamed on the stress and worries that they face as well as lack of adequate food consumption. Children were dirty and infected with boils and sores. One widow complained of kidney damaged and there was another case of bleeding of the uterus. This is not validated with medical check up but was simply reported by the widow.

All of the widows reported lack of sleep, headache, restlessness, mood swings, anger and irritation, sense of hopelessness and sadness as well as laziness and inertia. Lack of appetite and munching without being aware, alcohol consumption, smoking and severe mental problems were also found.

All of the widows stated that they faced difficulties to complete tasks. They had difficulty in making decisions on their own, lacked confidence to face outsiders and did not feel that they could face difficult situations on their own.

Out of 68 widows that were interviewed 35 were female-headed households and the extent of the problems that they were facing were more severe than the problems than the other widows were found to be experiencing. Most of the widows who were female household heads coped by seeking for help from natal family members, friends and neighbours. They helped by providing loans, food grains and moral support.

Of the total number of 134 children many revealed that they were being affected in some ways. Children showed signs that they were going through changes in their behaviour, were being mentally and physically affected while they were also becoming more dependent on their mothers. Of the total children, 116 children could not speak about the death of their father. Most of the children reacted with disbelief on hearing of the news of their father's death. The very young who did not quite understand what was

happening and who did not understand rituals of mourning questioned their mothers on why they were wearing white clothes. Many children simply wept and were in a state of shock.

Assistance from organizations was virtually nonexistent. There was only one case that reported the providing of shelter for eight children in Nepalgunj by the Sahara Shelter Home.

The following recommendations are made:

Government

- A district wide baseline with caste/ethnicity desegregation of the conflict widows and their families to be maintained at the CDO office.
- Disseminate information on support and compensation throughout the country to affected families.
- Local level journalism is to be promoted for awareness/education for social change necessary for positively changing the positions of widows.
- Review compensation rules to enable and ensure that all conflict widows irrespective of sides are given equitable compensation and support.
- Enable a way to get the compensation to the widows in a conducive/comfortable way and ensure its long-term security.
- Ensure facilitation and provision of citizenship and marriage certificates to all widows so that they can access support and help.
- Ensure education for all the children of the victims.
- Ensure long-term livelihood support for the widows and family members as suitable to their local environments and market availability, taking the level of education and skills of the widows under consideration.
- Ensure medical attention combined with psychological support programme.
- Doing away with all existing legal discriminations and facilitating/ensuring the enforcement of these.
- Create a sustained widows relief fund in the larger poverty alleviation fund of HMG.

Security Forces

- Review compensation policies for widows so that disbursement/s can happen in a facilitating and a helpful manner rather than add to her/family stress.
- Provide other as well (non monetary) outreach and support – for the widows and children.
- Review policies and provide opportunities for wives to join the army and police force – in non-combatant roles.
- Ensure provision of citizenship and marriage certificates to all widows so that they can access support and help.

NGOs/CBOs

- Help in awareness raising and disseminate information on support and compensation to affected families.
- Provision of additional care and support to affected widows/children and families.
- Assist in confidence building and self-esteem of the widows.
- Mutual support among widows needs to be organized/promoted by assisting the creation and sustenance of networks and support groups.
- Intervene to provide short-term/long-term emotional/psychological support to the widow/children/immediate family members for psychological healing and balanced life.
- Suitable safety nets both practical and emotional, e.g., counseling support, child-care
- Long-term income generating and empowering strategic interventions.
- Facilitate support the procurement of citizenship and marriage certificates to all widows so that they can access support and help.
- A coordinated plan of action of the various support organizations so as to minimize overlap and further confusion.

Donors

- Support area specific and relative research work in this area.
- Facilitate urgent action.
- Make policy recommendations that all widows in their working areas will be the priority group and will be supported through the donor programme activities.
- Support NGO/CBO action initiatives in this area, to name a few possible examples:
 - support the widows groups set up in over 20 districts by Women for Human Rights;
 - help extend outreach support through the grant-making programme of Tewa to rural women's organizations;
 - CIWIN/Saathi's programme for children and women;
 - RUWDUC's programme for women in the Far West;
 - Nagarik Aawaz's support programme for displaced youth volunteers, women and children, and extension peace workers, and reconciliation and forgiveness that has been conceptualized and is being tried;
 - Reach out through larger NGOs who have the existing outreach and the necessary non-funding support required for this work e.g. SAP/Nepal, NGO Federation/Nepal, INSEC etc.

ACROYMNS

CBO	Community Based Organization
CDO	Chief District Officer
CWIN	Child Workers in Nepal
DDC	District Development Committee
DFID	Department for International Development
GO	Government Organization
HMG	His Majesty's Government
IGAs	Income Generation Activities
INGOs	International Non Governmental Organizations
NGOs	Non Governmental Organizations
RUWDUC	Rural Women's Development and Unity Centre
SAP/Nepal	South Asia Partnership/Nepal
SVN/Nepal	Netherlands Development Organization/Nepal
VDC	Village Development Committee

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Fact Finding Study on Conflict Widows

I Introductions

Women and children are usually the worst hit people in conflict situations, and Nepal is no exception. In the past, particularly post democracy, women's organizations/mother's groups have been success phenomenon nationwide. The women led anti-alcohol movement, income generation and micro credit initiatives, women mobilized as community health volunteers and the very successful women forestry user groups are only some examples of women's successful participation in development initiatives. Hence, women in Nepal have immense potential and provide tremendous opportunity for development. Yet they face the biggest threat and backlash in the present conflict situations.

This fact-finding study was undertaken during the declaration of the state of emergency by the Government, after the escalation of violence owing to the Maoist insurgency in Nepal. This research reveals that peace and development work is now inevitable and mandatory action for civil society groups. In the present situation the most vulnerable category of citizens are Nepal's conflict widows and their children. In this situation the need to work for this particular group is clearly evident. Therefore in its urgency Nagarik Aawaz proposed a fact-finding research that could provide the basis and the guideline for all necessary interventions in this area in future reconciliation and reconstruction work.

II Process Leading up to this Proposal

What started out as an urgent topic of interest in SVN/Nepal, by Sriyani Prerera, Kamala Bisht, and other interested allies, made a very close match with the interests of the activists also involved in the conceptualizing/founding of the Nagarik Aawaz. A preliminary meeting between SNV staff and allies and Rita Thapa of the Nagarik Aawaz, led to the writing of the concept paper by Rita Thapa and Dr. Ava Darshan Shrestha. Sriyani Prerera's work in this area with the Sri Lankan war widows was particularly beneficial for the designing of methodology and tools development of the study. DFID's interest and immediate response in funding the study was an added encouragement for undertaking the research.

III Objectives of this Study

The main objectives of the study are to:

- investigate the conditions of the widows of the victims;
- assess economic, social, physical and psychological damage/situation that they are facing; and
- suggest areas of support that could be provided.

IV Methodology

A statistical sampling method for the selection of the research sites and respondents is not possible for a study of this nature since there is no systematic and reliable data sources. The widows of victims of the insurgency are presently living all over the country and estimation of the actual number of widows is not available. In fact, the government, army, police or even the INGOs/NGOs working in the area have documented very little data on the widows of conflict. The purpose of this study is, therefore, to visit and conduct the study in an area where they are most prevalent. The selection of Nepalgunj and Surkhet Districts as the two research sites, therefore, is primarily based on the information from informal sources that many of the widows of conflict are living in these areas, and the assessment of Rita Thapa's preliminary probe visit to this area.

The purpose of this study is to generate basic information. The study is exploratory and more of a fact-finding mission.

For the purpose of the study the widows are classified in the following categories:

1. Government (civil service);
2. Army/Police;
3. Civilians;
4. Local Leaders; and
5. Maoists.

Originally two teams consisting of two research assistants each were to visit one district each separately to interview in all 48 widows. However, during the process of conducting the research this changed and the four research assistants visited the same sites together and in total interviewed 68 widows (Kathmandu-10, Surkhet-20, Nepalgunj-38). During the pre-test of the checklist that was developed to generate information it was soon clear that there were widows of conflict living in Kathmandu as well. Hence, 10 widows from different parts of the country were interviewed in Kathmandu itself. Sriyari Parera of SNV/Nepal was with the research team members when they undertook field work in Surkhet.

Checklists were developed to conduct the interview. Interviews were tape-recorded which were transcribed later in Kathmandu. The interviews were held in a very congenial atmosphere that was non-threatening and acceptable to the widows (refer VI).

To enhance the skills of interrogation and investigation of the research assistants, in-depth orientation, training and discussions were conducted in Nagarik Awaz prior to the field visit.

VI Experience of Researchers

The four key researchers who were selected with care comprised of two university teachers, one development practitioner and one journalist. All of them as intended were feminist activists. Two of them were widows themselves. This was felt to be necessary at the design stage of the study.

The research was undertaken during the time of heightened conflict and unrest and the government declared state of emergency, which made the eleven days field research difficult and risky for the researchers. Travel meant having to deal with the often high-handed and rough behaviour of the security personnel at the check posts. The field stay meant sleepless night/s on the occasion when there were speculations of Surkhet being over taken by the Maoists or other security threats. Curfews were a common feature of the daily lives in the field. The respondents were widely scattered so a door-to-door approach in rural Nepal was both time consuming and strenuous. Besides which, creating the necessary enabling environment to interview the widows in their homes was not always easy.

The fact that some of the researchers were widows themselves helped in the opening-up process and trust building for the respondents. But researchers and their assistants all expressed that there were higher costs involved in doing this work. Owing mostly to the difficult case studies that investigated the very private and personal level, the researchers were deeply touched and moved. They complained of finding it hard to focus on their work, difficulty in concentration at times and in containing their emotions and tears. All the researchers said that a feeling of depression continued for a few days even after their return to Kathmandu.

The positive side of this experience for the researchers was that it was a very eye-opening experience for them that provided them direct exposure, significant learning and personal reflection. They were happy they could at least provide words of comfort and some direct support/outreach to the respondents. They also returned with enhanced self-motivation to work for the cause of the conflict widows.

VII Findings of the Study

7.1 Background Information

7.1.1 Number of widows interviewed

A total of 68 widows were interviewed by the research assistants which is presented in Table 1. Although 15 widows of each category were planned to be interviewed the conditions in the research sites proved that not all categories of widows were easily found. For instance, widows of police (32) were the majority followed by widows of government service personnel (12) who were primarily school teachers and widows of civilians. Maoist widows that were interviewed were eight in number while there were very few widows of local leaders that were interviewed. Hence, the numbers of widows falling in the different categories are not representative by nature but do indicate varying conditions as explained in the following sections.

Table 1: Total number of respondents by categories

Serial Number	Category	Total (n)
1.	Government Service	12
2.	Army	4
3.	Police	32
4.	Civilian	10
5.	Maoist	8
6.	Local leader	2
Total		68

7.1.2 Age of widows and their husbands that were killed

Information on the age of widows and the age of husbands killed is important for the identification and formulation of assistance and support that can be provided. The figures in Table 2 reveals that the average age of the widows was 30 years while the average age of the husbands that were killed was 35 years. The youngest widow was 19 years old while the oldest was 45 years old. The youngest husband to be killed was 20 years old while the oldest was 51 years old.

By categories the youngest civil servant widow was 22 years old while the oldest was 44 years old. The youngest civil servant husband to be killed was 26 years old while the oldest was 46 years. The youngest army widow was 19 years old while the oldest was 24 years. The youngest army personnel to be killed were 24 years old while the oldest was 37 years. The youngest police widow was 20 years old while the oldest was 37 years. The youngest police to be killed was 21 years old while the oldest was 51 years. The youngest civilian widow was 22 years old while the oldest 45 years. The youngest civilian husband to be killed was 24 years old while the oldest was 50 years. The youngest Maoist widow was 20 years old while the oldest was 43 years old. The youngest Maoist husband to be killed was 20 years old while the oldest was 44 years old. The youngest local leader widow was 35 years old while the oldest was 35 years. The youngest local leader to be killed was 43 old while the oldest was 43 years.

Table 2: Average age of widow and age of husband when killed

S. Number (n)	Category	Average age of widow	Average age of husband when killed
1. 12	Government Service	34	37
2. 4	Army	24	30
3. 32	Police	26	31
4. 10	Civilian	27	34
5. 8	Maoist	27	29
6. 2	Local leader	42	48
Total (68)		30	35

7.1.3 Age at marriage of the widows and their husbands

Table 3 presents the age at marriage of the widows and their husbands. The age at marriage of the widows and their husband reveal that child marriage was still practiced although it is legally not permitted. The youngest age at marriage of the widows was 9 years while the oldest age at marriage was 24 years. The youngest age at marriage of the husbands was 12 years while the oldest age at marriage was 34 years.

The youngest age at marriage of the widow of government civil servant was 9 years while the oldest was 25 years. The youngest age at marriage of government civil servant was 12 years while the oldest was 34 years. The youngest age at marriage of army widow was 14 years while the oldest was 19 years. The youngest age at marriage of the army personnel was 19 years while the oldest was 30 years. The youngest age at marriage of police widow was 13 years while the oldest was 24 years. The youngest age at marriage of the police was 17 years while the oldest was 31 years. The youngest civilian widow was 12 years while the oldest was 21 years. The youngest age at marriage of civilian husband was 17 years

while the oldest was 25 years. The youngest age at marriage of Maoist widow was 14 years while the oldest 21 years. The youngest age at marriage of Maoist killed was 15 years while the oldest was 30 years. The youngest age at marriage of the widow of local leader was 15 years while the oldest was 16. The age at marriage of local leader was 19 years.

Table 3: Average age at marriage of widows and husbands

S. Number	Category	Average age of widow at marriage	Average age of husband at marriage
1. 12	Government Service	19	24
2. 4	Army	17	23
3. 32	Police	17	23
4. 10	Civilian	16	19
5. 8	Maoist	17	18
6. 2	Local leader	15	19
Total (68)		17	19

7.1.4 Average size of families

Table 4 reveals that the number of family members eating from the same hearth was 365. This means that the average size of the family was 5.36. If the numbers of deaths in conflict stated as 8,000 in local media is to be considered, the total number of population directly affected would be as high as 42,880. But the estimated number of deaths in fact is higher than the reported 8,000 since the correct number of deaths of men and women of the Maoists is not known and could be large numbers. There is no system in place yet to record the number of deaths and effort to register the deaths at the district level has not been undertaken by any organization including the Chief District Officer (CDO).

The number of dependents was 256 that indicate that the average dependents were 3.76. The category of civilian families had the largest number of family members (7.3) while the category of local leader had the least numbers of family members (4). Again the category of civilian families had the largest number of dependents (5.8) while the category of government service families had the least numbers of dependents (2.9).

Table 4: Total number of family members and dependents

S. Number	Category	Family members eating from the hearth	Dependents
1. 12	Government Service	56 (4.6)	35 (2.9)
2. 4	Army	18 (4.5)	21 (5.2)
3. 32	Police	158 (4.9)	99 (3.1)
4. 10	Civilian	73 (7.3)	58 (5.8)
5. 8	Maoist	52 (6.5)	35 (4.3)
6. 2	Local leader	8 (4)	8 (4)
Total (68)		365 (5.36 average family size)	256 (3.76)

7.1.5 Total numbers of children and attendance at school

In all there were 134 school going age group children that were affected by the conflict in the 68 families. Of these 78 were female children while 56 were male children (Table 5). Of the children attending primary classes 53 were female children while 41 were male children. However, of the children attending secondary classes 11 were female children while 14 were male children. High school attendance reveals that 4 were female children while one was a male child. There were also two female children and one male child from the civilian and government service families that were attending college. Six female children and 4 male children of school going age were also found not attending school.

Table 5: Numbers of children attending/not attending school

S. No.	Category	Total numbers of children		Primary school		Secondary school		High school		Not going to school (above 5 years of age)	
		F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
1. 12	Government Service	13	15	7	14	5	1	1	-	-	-
2. 4	Army	5	3	5	3	-	-	-	-	-	1
3. 32	Police	27	23	24	18	1	5	2	-	2	1
4. 10	Civilian	12	8	11	5	1	3	-	-	2	1
5. 8	Maoist	10	5	6	1	4	4	-	-	-	-
6. 2	Local leader	1	2	-	-	-	1	1	1	2	1
Total (68)		78	56	53	41	11	14	4	1	6	4

7.1.6 Reasons for children not attending school

The reasons expressed as to why children of school going age were not attending school were primarily because of psychological problems that they were now facing. The psychological problems were lack of attention, mentally not prepared to sit for the School Leaving Certificate examinations, and fear of security. Maoists children were sent to Kathmandu while one child simply ran away to India. The widows also stated economic reasons as to why the children had dropped out of school. Widows stated that they did not have funds to buy books and uniforms for the children. Children were now required to find work to support the family, and children had to also assist in the household and farm activities. A girl child was sent to live with the natal family and hence dropped out of school for lack of funds. It appears that more female children were dropping out of school than boy children. Lack of awareness of the widows was also observed to be a reason why children were not attending school.

7.1.7 Levels of education of the widows

The data on literacy and education of the widows is important since this data provides information on their capacities and capabilities that can assist in the identification of programme activities and support for them. Twenty-four widows were illiterate while 44 were literate. Of the literate widows 16 widows had primary education (Table 6). Similarly, 6 widows had attained secondary education and 19 high school education while only 3 had college education. The widows of government officers have attained more education than the widows of other categories. Widows of police and army also reveal better levels of education than the remaining categories. The widows of local leaders had no education while the widows of Maoists and civilians were either illiterate or had attained only primary education with the exception of one widow of civilians who had attended high school.

Table 6: Literacy/Education Levels of Widows

S. Number	Category	Illiterate	Literate	Primary	Secondary	High school	College
1. 12	Government Service	2	10	2	2	3	3
2. 4	Army	-	4	1	1	2	-
3. 32	Police	8	24	8	3	13	-
4. 10	Civilian	7	3	2	-	1	-
5. 8	Maoist	5	3	3	-	-	-
6. 2	Local leader	2	-	-	-	-	-
Total (68)		24	44	16	6	19	3

7.1.8 Possession of citizenship and marriage certificates

Possession of citizenship certificate and the marriage certificate are required to access any support that have been formulated by the government and different organizations including the bilateral and multilateral donor organizations for the widows and their family members. Table 7 reveals that 60 widows possessed citizen certificate while the remaining 8 did not have citizen certificates. The figures indicate that while the other categories of widows had citizen certificates the majority of widows of Maoists followed by widows of government personnel did not have their citizen certificates.

Table 7: Widows with/without Citizenship Certificate

S. Number	Category	With citizenship certificate	Without citizenship certificate
1. 12	Government Service	9	3
2. 4	Army	4	-
3. 32	Police	31	1
4. 10	Civilian	9	1
5. 8	Maoist	5	3
6. 2	Local leader	2	-
Total (68)		60	8

Similar to the above finding Table 8 reveals that 57 widows had marriage certificates while 11 widows did not have marriage certificates. Once again, almost all of the widows of the army, police, civilian and local leaders had marriage certificates but majority of the widows of Maoists did not possess a marriage certificate. Some of the widows of government service personnel also did not possess their marriage certificates.

Table 8: Widows with/without Marriage Certificate

S. Number	Category	With marriage certificate	Without marriage certificate
1. 12	Government Service	9	3
2. 4	Army	4	-
3. 32	Police	31	1
4. 10	Civilian	9	1
5. 8	Maoist	2	6
6. 2	Local leader	2	-
Total (68)		57	11

7.1.9 Place of residence and reasons of displacement of the widows

Displacement of the widows and their family members can be extremely traumatic but it is their only way out through which they can seek for and assess support. This displacement is quite different from the migration that many families in Nepal have to resort to eke out a living. Table 9 reveals that 36 widows continued living in the same residence as before but 32 widows were now living elsewhere. There were almost equal numbers of widows and their families that were living elsewhere in all the categories.

Table 9: Place of residence of the widows

S. Number	Category	Same as before	Change in residence after husband was killed
1. 12	Government Service	7	5
2. 4	Army	3	1
3. 32	Police	15	17
4. 10	Civilian	5	5
5. 8	Maoist	5	3
6. 2	Local leader	1	1
Total (68)		36	32

The place of migration was primarily to the district head quarters (Nepalgunj and Surkhet) where they felt they could be safe and where they felt there were better opportunities of work. There were others that migrated to Kathmandu where they had relatives. They also felt that there were more opportunities for them to work. There were widows who were mainly of the police and army that preferred to live with or close to their natal homes. For many of the widows natal families were their only sources of support.

The reasons expressed for migrating were many. Primarily widows had migrated to simply forget the incident. Many of them had migrated for opportunities of work and support from natal home and friends. Fear of family members taking the compensation was another reason expressed. There were widows that had migrated to escape from psychological and verbal abuse by other members of family. Getting access to education for the children and security for teenage daughter was also another important reason for migration. There were widows that had migrated to Kathmandu to get compensation while there were others that had migrated out of fear of interrogation and harassment by Maoists as well as security forces. Encroachment of land and home by Maoist was another reason expressed.

7.1.10 Separation and reasons for separation of family members

There were in all 15 members of the families that were separate because of the death of the male member of the family (Table 10). Out of the total 15 members that were separated 12 were children while the rest consisted of daughter-in-law/s and grandchildren.

Table 10: Family members that were separated

S. Number	Category	Children that were separated	Daughter-in-law that were separated	Grandchildren that were separated	Total family members that were separated
1. 12	Government Service	2	-	-	2
2. 4	Army	-	-	-	-
3. 32	Police	2	-	-	2
4. 10	Civilian	3	-	-	3
5. 8	Maoist	2	-	-	2
6. 2	Local leader	3	1	2	6
Total (68)		12	1	2	15

The main reasons for separation of family members were for access to education, security and lack of income and/or support. A male member of the family abandoned home out of fear of the Maoists and in another case the security force arrested the brother of a Maoist. There was one particular case in which the widow stated that fear of being taken by the Maoist because of problems of infertility forced her to leave her home.

7.1.11 Could it have been avoided?

Upon query to whether the death of the husband could have been avoided many of the widows responded that they had requested their husbands to leave their jobs but the husband had refused. Lack of other opportunities for work was the main reason why the husbands refused to leave their job. The husbands in the police and army joined the forces with the hope to receive pension and higher allowances when deputed to remote areas. There were husbands prepared to die on the job and become martyrs. Many felt that lack of provision of security from the security forces even upon request when threats were given was responsible for the deaths. The widows also stated that they were not prepared and had no idea as to how to handle threats. Death after being injured was blamed on carelessness from medical personnel and lack of funds for medical care. Widows of Maoists stated severe physical violence when government declared Maoists as terrorists as the main reason for the death of their husbands. Many Maoist widows expressed the feeling that they were not doing anything wrong and hence raised the question as to why they were killed.

7.2 Economic Conditions

7.2.1 Sources of income

Most of the families of the widows were dependent on the pensions that they were receiving (Table 11). Similarly, the present occupation of the families was primarily related to agricultural farming. Families dependent on income earned from wage labour followed this. Very few families were in government service and undertaking business. However, there were quite a number of families that reported no occupation.

Table 11: Present occupation of the family

S. Number	Category	Agri-farming	Govt. service	Business	Pension	Wage labour	No occupation
1. 12	Government Service	4	4	-	1	3	3
2. 4	Army	1	-	-	1	2	2
3. 32	Police	11	1	3	23	5	5
4. 10	Civilian	2	-	-	-	7	7
5. 8	Maoist	4	-	-	-	1	1
6. 2	Local leader	-	1	1	-	-	-
Total (68)		22	6	4	25	18	18

Thirty-one widows were undertaking agricultural work to sustain their families (Table 12). Twenty-six widows were not working at all. There were four each of the widows that were earning from business and working as wage labour respectively. Likewise, widow's earning from service, selling wood and teaching respectively were one each.

Table 12: Occupation of Widows

S. Number	Category	Agriculture	Wage Labour	Business	Selling	Teacher	Service	No work
1. 12	Government Service	5	-	-	1	1	1	4
2. 4	Army	1	-	-	-	-	-	3
3. 32	Police	18	1	2	-	-	-	11
4. 10	Civilian	3	1	-	-	-	-	5
5. 8	Maoist	4	2	1	-	-	-	1
6. 2	Local leader	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
Total (68)		31	4	4	1	1	1	26

Widows that were receiving financial support were 40 while 28 reported that they were not receiving any financial support (Table 13). Of those widows that reported that they were receiving financial support 26 reported that they were being adequately supported while 14 reported that they were not adequately supported.

Table 13: Families receiving financial support

S. Number	Category	Families receiving financial support	Families that were adequately supported	Families that were not adequately supported	Families that did not receive any support
1. 12	Government Service	5	-	5	7
2. 4	Army	3	2	1	1
3. 32	Police	24	24	-	8
4. 10	Civilian	7	-	7	3
5. 8	Maoist	-	-	-	8
6. 2	Local leader	1	-	1	1
Total (68)		40	26	14	28

It was reported that the government has made provision for all of the families to receive Rs. 25,000 to conduct the funeral rites but not all had received it. Additionally, the widows of the security forces, which include army and police, were eligible to receive Rs. 750,000 as compensation as well as the salary of the deceased husband for 7 years while and those receiving pension were eligible to receive pension for rest of their lives. It was found that all of the respondents of the security forces have received compensation. The children of the deceased security forces were also eligible to receive Rs. 100 per child per month for education and free health care for the family members. A provision was made for police widows to join the force if they wished but this has not been enforced. The widow of the deceased government service personnel was declared to be Rs. 150,000 but not all of the widows had received the compensation (Box-1). Sadly the Maoists widows received nothing (Box-1).

Box – 1

Area – Ashi Bhag, Jumla
Widow – Civil

Soonya is an illiterate and a poor 30 years old widow who lives with her four children, two boys aged 12 and 8, and two girls aged 10 and 4. She presently tries to support her children through her hard labour of selling firewood. She is unaware of any security funds due from her husband's office. She often worries as to how she can pay back the Rs. 3000 she borrowed from a distant relative for the funeral rites of her husband. In fact her biggest worry is putting food in front of her hungry children and that she may not be able to give them a better future.

Soonya was her husband's second wife. They both worked to maintain their nuclear family of six people.

Her husband was an innocent victim of the crossfire between the Maoists and the police.

Area – Surkhet
Widow – Maoist

Seva is a 29 years old widow who now lives in Surkhet with her two children - a son aged 12 and a daughter who is 10. She does not observe customary practices assigned to widows as per the wishes of her late husband. She is hurt that the government provides support to all the other widows but not to those like her. She supports herself and her children by daily wage labour (breaking stones), and selling milk. She is bent on providing higher education to her two children who are very bright in their classes. It was almost like the son had to drop out of school to help his mother to earn money, when Tewa a Nepali non-governmental organization stepped in to pay his tuition fees for some time and by helping him enroll in the SOS school in the town. In spite of this misfortune, Seva is positive and stoic in her approach to life.

Seva and her husband had come down from Dailekh, to set up home in Surkhet. He was an electrician and had joined the Maoists to fight for the rights of the poor and the disadvantaged. In the recent past he was hardly ever home, but was still providing support to the family. He was also very conscious of women's rights and felt that widows should continue to use colours and ornaments like before. During these past years, it was Seva who took day to day care of the children and provided for them.

The husband identified by the security forces as a Maoist area commander was killed in action.

7.2.2 Economically what changed

The impact of the death of the husband was felt immediately since most of the families did not have the funds to even perform the funeral rites. This was followed by children dropping out of school and decrease in access to basic needs, such as food, clothes, shelter and health care. The access to loans from relatives, friends and neighbours also was reduced since there was no guarantee that the loans would be paid back by the widows. Among the widows that were taking loans it was found that widows that looked for opportunities to work was looked upon negatively and hence many faced problems to getting work. The widows also reported that there was lack of funds to celebrate religious festivals, e.g. Dasain and Diwali.

7.2.3 Who helped

Mainly natal family, neighbours and friends supported the widows. Friends of the deceased husband and colleagues also helped the widows. It was observed that among the Brahmins and Chhetries assistance from mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law was very limited while among the occupation and ethnic groups mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law very found to be very supportive. This could be because of the rigid rites

and rituals and the discrimination against daughters-in-law among the Brahmins and Chhetries while this was not the case among the occupational and ethnic groups who were found to be more considerate.

7.2.4 Who did they borrow from and who stayed hungry?

Most of the widows that were taking loans were getting loans from friends, relatives and neighbours. There were some widows that had accessed loans from the Single Women Groups Organization. Source of income has affected that families' access to food as well. Not all were receiving adequate food. It was reported that mainly the widows remained hungry after feeding children.

7.2.5 What kind of support do you expect from government?

Investigation on the kind of support that was expected from the government was revealed to be many. Primarily widows requested for free education for their children. This was followed by job/work for themselves and other members of family to sustain the needs of their families. Medical support for themselves and other members of family was also requested since many did not have the funds to seek for health care. The widows stated that skill development to undertake income-generating activities and support for access to markets for their products was required. It was suggested that since almost all of the families were psychologically affected establishment of rehabilitation centers was a must for the families. The widows reported that many of them were unable to access compensation either due to lack of knowledge or due to fear of official procedures. Hence, the widows requested that the government should make access to compensation easy and less complicated. However, there were still other widows that expected nothing from the government because of lack of hope and trust towards government.

7.2.6 Income Generating Activities (IGAs)

Widows were found to be undertaking income generation activities (IGAs) to meet the needs of the family. The widows reported that some of them were working as wage labourer and as government personnel. The majority of widows were undertaking agricultural work such as vegetable cultivation and livestock and poultry rearing. Some widows were also operating tea-shops and local grocery shops. Some others had opened up lodging and fooding enterprises (Box-2). There were also some widows that were undertaking sewing as an income generating activity.

The widows were using the compensation for IGAs. The widows were also getting advice from relatives and friends.

Box – 2

*Area – Naumale, Dailekh
Widow – police*

Samman is a 30 years old widow with four children two boys aged 7 and 3 and two daughters aged 13 and 11. She now lives in a little hut she built, far away from her husband's home in Surkhet, and runs a little shop for her survival with the compensation money she received from the government. Her boys go to private schools and the daughters go to government school. Besides the pain of her present situation, she is now alone and feels vulnerable and helpless fssor not having the support of family, friends and the community she was familiar with. She finds it very difficult to communicate now.

On the death of her husband, Samman underwent great psychological trauma on account of the ill treatment she received from her husband's family. She suffered further abuse from the Maoists who took advantage of her situation. They looted her jewellery, abused her physically and verbally and only withheld from taking her life, making considerations for the four children.

Samman's husband was killed while in duty, in an encounter with the Maoists.

Investigation on the reasons of why not all widows were undertaking income generating activities was clearly stated to be that the widows lacked skills, lacked opportunities to develop skills, lack of market and lacked funds. Most of the widows expressed that household chores, child care and farm activities kept

them busy with little time to undertake IGA. There were widows that explained that family members prevented them from venturing outside the house to work because of insecurity and also because their mobility was closely monitored and restricted. Some of the widows were mentally disturbed and were suffering from depression that prevented them from undertaking IGAs. There were still other widows that simply lacked knowledge on IGAs and did not have the confidence to undertake any activity.

7.2.7 IGA problems

When asked about the problems the widows faced in undertaking IGA, it was once again voiced that a lack of funds, skills, lack of seed money and inputs were stated. Lack of market was expressed to be a problem while lack of motivation was also reported. The widows also stated that lack of trust from the community and the local money-lenders was a problem. Many of the widows said that the DDC/VDC and other organizations ignore and do not give attention to the needs of the widows.

7.2.8 Expectations to improve economic status

The widows suggested that primarily opportunities for IGAs should be created for them. Jobs for widows and their family members were another suggestion while special preference in projects and programme implemented by the government, INGOs and NGOs and reservations/quotas for widows was also suggested.

7.3 Social Conditions

7.3.1 Change in attitudes

The investigation on the social conditions of the widows revealed that 36 widows stated that there were no changes in the attitude towards them after the death of their husbands from the community while 32 widows stated that there were negative changes in the attitudes of the community towards them (Table 14). Similarly, 33 widows reported no change in attitude towards them from the other members of the family while 35 experienced negative attitudes within the family.

Nine widows reported experiencing violence after husband was killed while three cases of violence experienced by children were reported.

Table 14: Social conditions and changes

S. Number	Category	No change in attitude from community	Negative change in attitude from community	No change in attitude within family	Negative change in attitude within family	Violence experienced by widow	Violence experienced by children
1. 12	Government Service	5	7	7	5	2	-
2. 4	Army	3	1	4	-	-	-
3. 32	Police	16	15	11	21	6	2
4. 10	Civilian	3	6	3	6	1	-
5. 8	Maoist	5	3	6	2	-	-
6. 2	Local leader	2	-	2	-	-	1
Total (68)		36	32	33	35	9	3

7.3.2 Support from other family members

Other members of the family were reported to be more caring and supportive to the widows. Widows reported that they were being differently compared to other daughters-in-law. Few of the widows were even being encouraged to remarry. Family members were providing economic support as well. Primarily mothers-in-law were found to be providing moral support and care (Box-1). Mothers-in-law were providing food-grains and economic support.

Box – 3

*Area – Banke,
Widow – police*

Surakshya is a beautiful, 19 years old widow. She was seven months pregnant with her child when her husband was killed. She lives with her husband's family who have given her all the care and support treating her like their own child. They have put no restrictions on her as a Hindu widow in terms of the use of colour and ornaments. They are ready to educate her if she wishes, are also open to her remarriage, and will use the compensation money she received to set up a new life for her and her baby.

Surakshya fell in love with her husband while still at high school. The parents bemoan that their son predicted his death saying that he would not desert his friends to save his life and therefore sooner or later death in the battle ground would be inevitable. Surakshya's is a unique and an exceptional case of a supportive family environment in Nepal.

Her husband, a policeman was killed in action during a Maoist attack.

There were also negative behaviour from family members. For instance, the children were found to be ignoring their mothers. The brother's wives were found to be ill-treating the widows. Often family members did not permit the widow to meet other community people without the presence of other members of the family. Some of the widows even explained that good treatment from other members of the family was because of the compensation that would be given to the widows. Hence, there was apprehension and great deal of suspicion that daughters-in-law may leave the family (Box-4).

Box – 4

*Area – Chinchu, Surkhet
Widow – Civil*

Sabha is a 25 years old widow who lives with her two children, a boy aged 9 years, and a daughter who is 6 years old. After the death of her husband, a political activist who ran a popular pharmacy in town, Sabha survives on the house rent that she gets. Being uneducated she could not carry on the work of the pharmacy. She also has bank loans in connection with the business that needs clearing. Though her husband did not take a share of the inheritance, the in-laws now threaten her saying they will sell the house, with the excuse that she will elope one day and the children will not get their property. This fabrication gives her great pain and worry. She feels even the political party her husband belonged to has abandoned her now.

Sabha and her husband lived a charmed life. He was a very popular and a charismatic man. As a health practitioner, he was always ready to heal and help. The business was doing very well. Soon this popularity earned him grudges from a competitor in the same locality who also belonged to a rival political party. Ultimately this created doubts among the local security regarding his identity. After several interrogations by the local security, he was one day taken from his home by the police and killed. It was only after several days that the family identified his body. Later they buried him

In very troubled times, the husband was but a victim of doubts, jealousy, and mistrust rather than any plausible cause.

7.3.3 Support from friends/husband's friends

The friends of the widows and the friends of their husbands often assisted to access compensation. This was reported primarily among widows of security forces. Friends also gave moral support and advice. However, there were many widows that reported that there was a change in behaviour of friends after husband's death. They were now being ignored and many were refused loans that they easily accessed before the death of the husband.

7.3.4 Support from community

The widows reported greater care and moral support from community members. Support from community members was more forthcoming in families where there were children. In some cases the community members have assisted to get a job for the widow.

Some widows reported that verbally/externally there was no visible change, but they felt change in behaviour towards them from community members. Verbal support was forthcoming but there was very little support in action. Community members were found to have provided support during the 13 days of mourning but after that there was no support. Most of the widows stated that they experienced reduced level of respect from friends and neighbours as well as lack of trust. Many of the widows reported that they themselves withdraw and take a back seat during religious/cultural festivals because of superstitions and the belief that widows bring ill omen. Many of the widows felt that they were ignored, sometimes despised and even ill-treated. Very few people came to visit the widows as compared to the times before the deaths of their husbands.

Many newly migrated widows have not received any support from the community members while the Maoists widows have received no support at all from the community members. Even the local priest refused to come and perform the last rites for a Maoist that had been killed.

7.3.5 Social problems and taboos

Primarily the widows were being blamed for the death of the husband and for bringing bad luck. Widows were treated as ill omen and, hence, were being ill treated and abusive language was being used. Back biting about the widows was reported to be rampant. There was a growing feeling of negative attitude towards the widows and people spoke ill of them. Community members were found to be refusing to drink water offered by the widows. Many widows stated that during auspicious occasions since they were believed to bring evil omen the widows themselves deliberately avoided attending such occasions. They also reported that they were viewed with suspicion even if they just combed their hair and ventured outside the home. There were widows who reported that wearing white clothes during mourning induced ill treatment from others. A Maoist widow was being ill-treated since she has refused to perform the last rites because the body of the husband has not yet been handed over to her. Another Maoist widow reported that she was looked upon with suspicion since she has not abided by the cultural norms because she has continued wearing the *tika* and red clothes. However, for the widows that had migrated many of the widows reported that they do not face severe social problems.

7.3.6 Support from organizations

All of the widows reported that they had not received any support from organizations to deal with social problems.

7.4 Physical/Psychological Conditions

7.4.1 Physical problems

All of the widows reported that they had aged before time. They had reduced weight and were anemic. Gastric problem was reported by 51 widows which they blamed on the stress and worries that they face as well as lack of adequate food consumption. It was observed that 17 children were dirty and were infected with boils and sores. One widow complained of kidney damaged and there was another case of bleeding of the uterus. This is not validated with medical check up but was simply reported by the widow.

7.4.2 Psychological problems

All of the widows reported lack of sleep, headache, restlessness, mood swings, anger and irritation, sense of hopelessness and sadness as well as laziness and inertia. Fifty-one widows stated lack of appetite while 28 reported that they were munching without being aware. Seven widows reported alcohol consumption and smoking. Four widows with severe mental problems were also found. This is reported through observation of the research assistants and is not based on clinical diagnosis.

7.4.3 Where do you go?

Widows that were facing problems were seeking for health care. Fifty-one widows reported to have gone to the nearest medical pharmacy. Seven widows sought care from hospitals only when their problem was severe while five widows that reported that they sought care from the local faith healer/s. On the other hand, 51 widows did not seek for medical care at all.

7.4.4 Do you feel any changes in your behaviour?

Investigation on the changes that the widows themselves have observed concerning their behaviour reveal that the widows do not like to entertain and socialize anymore as before. They found themselves gazing into space and observed that their thoughts were not focused, but was wandering elsewhere. Many of the widows responded that they just stay alone and weep. Some of the widows explained that since they do not speak as before nobody gives them attention.

All of the widows stated that they faced difficulties to complete tasks. Fifty-one widows reported they had difficulty in making decisions on their own and also lacked confidence to face outsiders. Seventeen widows did not feel that they could face difficult situations on their own.

7.4.5 How do you cope?

The widows stated that they depended on help from natal home, parents, brothers-in-law and fathers-in-law as well as friends. Almost all of the widows reported that primarily the kinds of help they were receiving were economic support and opportunities to educate children.

The widows stated that they had received no counseling although they felt that this could have assisted immensely and there was a great need.

7.5 Female Headed Households

7.5.1 Conditions of female household heads

Out of 68 widows that were interviewed 35 were female headed households and the extent of the problems that they were facing were more severe than the problems that other widows were found experiencing. The problems that the widows of female headed households were facing were stated to be that people do not trust them, there was no income to feed the family, even basic needs, such as food, education and clothes of the children could not be provided. This category of widows also stated that they lacked funds or income for health care and to undertake business. Since these families lacked human power the widows were facing problems to undertake farming activities.

Personally the widows found difficulty in spending their time, taking decisions on their own and they also lacked confidence to do anything. The widows feared of the possibility of being killed and were totally unsure of the future of themselves and their children. In the community the widows experienced difficulty to preserve their good reputation and get due respect.

7.5.1 Coping strategies of female household heads

Most of the widows who were female household heads coped by seeking for help from natal family members, friends and neighbours. They helped by providing loans, food grains and moral support. There were about 14 widows of this category who were helped by no one. About five of these widows felt a

sense of helplessness and expressed their wish to die. On the other hand there were four widows that reported that they did not seek help for anyone but attempted to solve the problem by themselves.

7.6 Impact on Children

Of the total number of 134 children many revealed that they were being affected in some ways. Twenty-four children showed signs that they were going through changes in their behaviour, 23 were being mentally and physically affected while 34 were becoming more dependent on their mothers. Of the total children, 116 children could not speak about the death of their father.

Table 15: Impact on children

S. Number	Category	Children going through change in behaviour	Children who speak about father's death	Children being physically and mentally affected	Children becoming more dependent on mother	Mothers who have been able to fulfill children's needs
1. 12	Government Service	4	4	6	6	6
2. 4	Army	1	-	1	3	2
3. 32	Police	10	6	10	22	12
4. 10	Civilian	6	7	4	2	2
5. 8	Maoist	-	-	-	-	4
6. 2	Local leader	3	1	2	2	-
Total (68)		24	18	23	34	26

How did the children take the news?

Most of the children reacted with disbelief on hearing of the news of their father's death. The very young who did not quite understand what was happening and who did not understand rituals of mourning questioned their mothers on why they were wearing white clothes. Many children simply wept and were in a state of shock.

Change in behaviour

Children who are very young have not responded on the news of their fathers' death. Generally grown up children were found to have comforted their mothers when they wept while there were others who were suffering from shock and were just dazed when their mothers wept. There were children who were reassuring their mothers that they would look after their mothers when they grew big. Many of the children were found not to leave their mothers alone and would worry about them. There were children who were depressed and have dropped out of school while there were also children who suffer from fear, have become very stubborn and do not mix with other children. Many of the children were not telling anything to their mothers out of the fear that their mothers would worry. Children were curious about the deaths of their fathers. They questioned their mothers and sought for answers that the mothers were unable to provide, hence they expressed their wish to take revenge. Some of the severely affected children were found speaking to the picture of their deceased father. The signs of stress were obvious with the children since they had lost weight.

7.7 Support Systems

Investigation on the support systems that the widows were accessing revealed that 37 of the total numbers of widows received support from friend and neighbours, 31 received support from relatives while 6 received support from organizations. There were 26 of the widows who did not receive any support at all. The support was mainly in the form of loans, food, cash to perform last rites and child-care.

Table 16: Support

S. Number	Category	Widows who did not get any support	Widows receiving support from organizations	Widows receiving support from relatives	Widows receiving support from friends, neighbours
1. 12	Government Service	6	-	7	5
2. 4	Army	-	-	1	1
3. 32	Police	11	2	16	16
4. 10	Civilian	5	2	5	7
5. 8	Maoist	2	2	-	6
6. 2	Local leader	2	-	2	2
Total (68)		26	6	31	37

Assistance from organizations was virtually nonexistent. There was only one case that reported providing shelter for eight children in Nepalgunj by the Sahara Shelter Home.

7.8 Future plans

Many of the widows stated that their future plans for themselves would be to undertake livestock rearing, undertake business, get trained in skill development, try to get job in the security forces, build a house and educate their children by working as labourers. Some of the widows do not have any plans at all. Future plans for the children was mainly to get a good education for the younger ones while for the older children it was access to jobs.

VIII Conclusions and Recommendations

Generally in Nepal, a woman's position is derived only from her relationship with the men under whose relational or legal protection she is. This is her father, uncle or brother in her natal home, the father-in-law or the husband in her home of marriage, and then her son/s during her later years. In a predominantly Hindu society, religious and cultural practices have maintained implicit and explicit rules whereby the woman has restricted mobility, virtually no decision-making, and no control and power. Thus widowhood has tremendous implications for Nepali women, especially those who are from Hindu families. The stringent and dehumanizing practices of mourning that she has to observe negatively affects her existing conditions bringing it down to the lowest levels. This makes her doubly vulnerable and at risk – emotionally and physically.

This situation can be a little milder in certain ethnic groups which have more egalitarian structures, or when the family is truly evolved and is therefore thoughtful and caring. But generally the situation can be very desperate, particularly since in Nepal often the only existing safety net lies in the support of the family and the community.

The overarching findings of the widows in a situation of armed conflict in Nepal are that:

- the widows are very young, mostly between the age of 20 – 35 years of age according to research findings;
- they have at least 2 to 5 children;
- mostly the children are not old enough to be of significant help – rather they require additional support and care;
- the bereavement is always sudden and often unexpected or denied – so the level of shock and trauma tends to be higher;
- almost all of them have no education and skills beyond their required traditional roles of being housewives and mothers;
- they have no ownership to land (though inheritance laws have changed recently);

- since their power and position is acquired through men, they are immediately slotted in a position of powerlessness and are at the mercies of relatives primarily on their husband's sides;
- the widows have little social standing and often very little emotional support;
- there is a further marginalization and invisibility of the civilian widows and the ostracization of the Maoist widows makes this category even more vulnerable to risks; and;
- the compensation has added more worry and threats for most of the widows who have received it or are in a position to receive it.

Owing to the comprehension and understanding now gained through this fact-finding investigation, it is evident that there is no need for a follow-up larger research in the area. Rather it is useful to conduct area specific studies that can be more useful to local realities and needs, e.g., children born out of wedlock within the Maoist cadre, unwed mothers, and single fathers. A separate programme to study and redress the issue of the children of the conflict also needs to be set up. Although a taboo topic, at a later stage, it may be relevant to look into the issue of sexuality and its implications on the physical and psychological health of the widows in the given reality of stringent religious and cultural practices. Immediate relief work is urgent for this group, yet it is important to prioritize the most needy among them, e.g., female headed households, Maoist widows with no support, or displaced widows who also find themselves in hostile or alien environments. Based on the research findings, the existing realities, and the inputs from the workshop conducted on 15 April, 2003 (Annex I), the following recommendations for the different sectors are suggested.

Government

- A district wide baseline with caste/ethnicity desegregation of the conflict widows and their families to be maintained at the CDO office.
- Disseminate information on support and compensation throughout the country to affected families.
- Local level journalism is to be promoted for awareness/education for social change necessary for positively changing the positions of widows.
- Review compensation rules to enable and ensure that all conflict widows irrespective of sides are given equitable compensation and support.
- Enable a way to get the compensation to the widows in a conducive/comfortable way and ensure its long-term security.
- Ensure facilitation and provision of citizenship and marriage certificates to all widows so that they can access support and help.
- Ensure education for all the children of the victims.
- Ensure long-term livelihood support for the widows and family members as suitable to their local environments and market availability, taking the level of education and skills of the widows under consideration.
- Ensure medical attention combined with psychological support programme.
- Doing away with all existing legal discriminations and facilitating/ensuring the enforcement of these.
- Create a sustained widows relief fund in the larger poverty alleviation fund of HMG.

Security Forces

- Review compensation policies for widows so that disbursement/s can happen in a facilitating and a helpful manner rather than add to her/family stress.
- Provide other as well (non monetary) outreach and support – for the widows and children.
- Review policies and provide opportunities for wives to join the army and police force – in non-combatant roles.
- Ensure provision of citizenship and marriage certificates to all widows so that they can access support and help.

NGOs/CBOs

- Help in awareness raising and disseminate information on support and compensation to affected families.
- Provision of additional care and support to affected widows/children and families.
- Assist in confidence building and self-esteem of the widows.

- Mutual support among widows needs to be organized/promoted by assisting the creation and sustenance of networks and support groups.
- Intervene to provide short-term/long-term emotional/psychological support to the widow/children/immediate family members for psychological healing and balanced life.
- Suitable safety nets both practical and emotional, e.g., counseling support, child-care
- Long-term income generating and empowering strategic interventions.
- Facilitate support the procurement of citizenship and marriage certificates to all widows so that they can access support and help.
- A coordinated plan of action of the various support organizations so as to minimize overlap and further confusion.

Donors

- Support area specific and relative research work in this area.
- Facilitate urgent action.
- Make policy recommendations that all widows in their working areas will be the priority group and will be supported through the donor programme activities.
- Support NGO/CBO action initiatives in this area, to name a few possible examples:
 - support the widows groups set up in over 20 districts by Women for Human Rights;
 - help extend outreach support through the grant-making programme of Tewa to rural women's organizations;
 - CIWIN/Saathi's programme for children and women;
 - RUWDUC's programme for women in the Far West;
 - Nagarik Aawaz's support programme for displaced youth volunteers, women and children, and extension peace workers, and reconciliation and forgiveness that has been conceptualized and is being tried;
 - Reach out through larger NGOs who have the existing outreach and the necessary non-funding support required for this work e.g. SAP/Nepal, NGO Federation/Nepal, INSEC etc.

Note: Names in the case studies have been changed to protect identities.

Annex I

List of Participants – Small Group Work

Group 1 – Government

Bikram Subba - HURDEC
Seema Luitel
Usha Jha -
Sharmila Karki – Jagaran Nepal
Bihari Krishna Shrestha -
Saloni Shrestha
Ava Subedi – Action Aid

Group 2 – Security

Ganesh Chiluwal – ASMAN (Association of Maoist Victims)
Chuda Shrestha – SSP Nepal Police
Tanchoma – Rising Nepal
Nirmala Dhungana - WHR
Ambika Gajmere - FEDO
Sudha Shrestha

Group 3 – NGOs/CBOs and Civil Society Groups

Sunil Kumar Pokhrel – Dang
Ram Sharma – Advocacy Forum
Kopila Adhikari – Advocacy Forum
Jaya Prasad Poudel – CIVICT
Sita Gurung – Tehrathum
Amita Adhikari – WHR
Lily Thapa – WHR
Anjana Sakya – Beyond Beijing Committee and Human Rights

Group 1 – Additional Suggestions for Government

- Rehabilitation programme for the victims needs to be incorporated in the 2060/2061 Government Budget for immediate action
- Livelihood opportunities
- Skills development for income generation
- Victim registration/identity cards to facilitate educational/health/relief support
- Provision of compulsory scholarship in all related institutions: PABSON, Govt., SOS, Bal Mandir, etc.
- Employment of victims across/through FNCCI membership with a tax rebate provision to the employers

Group 2 – Additional Suggestions for Security

- Fixed assets needs to be reviewed
- Provision of a revolving fund to meet the immediate needs of the conflicts victims
- Citizenship certificate/marriage certificate/pension book should be arranged/made
- Rehabilitation of the victims should be speeded-up
- There should be an uniform policy (Nepal Police, Armed Police force and the RNA) for all affected victims of the conflict
- Welfare/support division should be set-up at central, regional, and zonal, and district level
- Expansion of additional victim support cells
- Army police scholarship programme should be extended to other schools as well

- Review compensation support arrangements. Monitoring mechanisms should be set up for this purpose
- Local need based skills and vocational training programme
- Networking for widows
- Provide seed money and savings/credit money

Group 3 – Additional Suggestions for NCOs/CBOs and Civil Society Groups

- Build trust
- Data collection and record keeping of the total number of widows at the community level
- Mobilization of community and local level CBOs/NGOs
- Clear vision is necessary for the best relief action
- Provide legal solutions
- Legal provision for compensation for torture
- Use of alternative word for “widow” – owing to systemic cultural/religious violence ex. Use of words like “raand” “boksee”
- Provision for economic empowerment schemes
- Positive discrimination for women e.g. affirmative actions, quota systems for women
- CBOs/NGOs act for social change to do away with ostracization and negative social stigmas
- Change the cycle of “chosen traumas” – (vicious cycle of revenge)
- Need for capacity building and empowering programmes